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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002688

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/I (KHOURY-KINCANNON AND INR/NESA HAY)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/13/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PRT KIRKUK: LOOKING FORWARD TO PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: Kirkuk PRT IPAO Andrew Veprek for reason 1.4(d).

This is a Kirkuk Provincial Reconstruction Team message.

11. (C) Summary. The Kirkuk Province elections director asserted that he is ready to conduct Provincial elections on 60-70 days' notice, although the province would clearly require additional GOI and Coalition Forces (CF) support for security and logistics. Leaders from all of Kirkuk's ethnic groups say that their communities will participate in provincial elections; however, many are pessimistic that the Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) can pass required legislation in time to hold elections before the end of the year. End Summary.

12. (U) Following a public statement by PM Maliki notionally calling for provincial elections before the end of the year, PRT officers met Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) Acting General Electoral Officer of Kirkuk Farhad Talabani (Kurd) to assess his office's preparedness to conduct such an election. Farhad said that his office maintains 25 voter registration offices in the province, each staffed by 12 electoral officials. Since they have conducted three elections in the past three years, he considers his staff to be well experienced. He said that his office could conduct elections before the end of the year if they were to be called, though he would need 60-70 days' notice. (Embassy Note: The IHEC and the International Electoral Advisory Team (IEAT) estimate an election preparation timeline of between 210 days and 90 days, depending on the status of the voter registry. End note.)

13. (SBU) However, conducting elections will take manpower. Farhad said that he would need 9500 electoral officers to operate the already-designated 1455 polling centers throughout the province. Security is his primary concern, and he said that conducting the election would also require the assignment of 8-10 Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) personnel to each polling center for two weeks. ISF personnel would not only provide security, but also prevent voter fraud and political interference during the voting.

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WHO VOTES?  
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14. (SBU) Based on ration card registrations, Farhad estimated that Kirkuk province has 691,000 eligible voters, 55-60 percent of whom are Kurds and 40-45 percent of whom are Turkmen and Arabs. Farhad said that the Ministry of Planning has no plans to conduct a census due to security concerns. However, such a census would be unnecessary before provincial council elections, he thought, because his office could check voter registrations against ration card records from the Ministry of Trade to develop a list of eligible voters. At polling centers, voters would present their ration cards as proof of residence in Kirkuk and eligibility to vote. Farhad

thought that the use of ration card records would prevent, or at least reduce, voter fraud. (Embassy Note: The voter registry used in the 2005 elections is obsolete, and the IHEC is creating a new national voter registry based on the food ration Public Distribution System, which will require 120 days. For fraud prevention reasons, the use of locally created provincial-only voter registries is prohibited by both the IHEC and the IEAT. End note.)

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BUT WILL ELECTIONS HAPPEN THIS YEAR?  
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¶15. (U) Farhad expressed his belief that Provincial elections could take place before the end of 2007, but pointed out that the CoR must first pass the Provincial Powers Law (PPL) to define, among other things, the powers and structures of provincial, district, and subdistrict governments. (Embassy Note. While it is logical to complete the Provincial Powers Law before moving forward with elections preparations, it is not technically necessary. However, CoR must complete a new elections law which addresses issues such as the electoral system and funding. Although work has started, an elections law has not been completed. More importantly, CoR prefers to finish the PPL before moving forward on an elections law. End Note.)

¶16. (SBU) Political leaders from all of Kirkuk's ethnic groups (including Arab representatives from both of Kirkuk's major tribes) separately told PRT that their communities would participate in provincial elections. However, without any correlation to ethnicity, they disagreed about whether elections would happen before the end of the year. While

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several echoed Farhad's remark that the CoR should pass the PPL and were (mistakenly) optimistic that it would do so before its August recess, others were pessimistic, pointing to inability of the CoR to achieve quorum and move legislation. Others thought that the security situation would frighten away voters. Sunni Arab Provincial Council member Mohammed Khalil added, in an unguarded moment, his hope that elections would take place before provincial boundary restoration under Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution. (Note: Though a logical step before holding elections, boundary restoration likely will dramatically increase the number of Kurds in the province and thus dilute Arab voting strength. End note.)

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COMMENT: POLITICAL INTERFERENCE LIKELY;  
GOI AND COALITION SUPPORT NEEDED  
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¶17. (C) A previous CF visit to Farhad's office belies his optimism about his department's ability to administer an election. There, an unknown person introduced himself as the Elections Director and said that department staff lacked training and would be unable to conduct elections until properly trained. To the PRT, Farhad dismissed this as the grumblings of an unmotivated employee who did not want elections because he did not want to have to do the work associated with them. However, the incident suggests that Farhad does not properly control his employees and will have difficulty leading his department through elections. Locally, Farhad is regarded as weak and unable to resist political influence, especially from Kurdish parties. He admitted to the PRT that many of his staff were hired based on their ethnicities rather than their qualifications.

¶18. (C) Recruiting and training 9500 electoral officers would require early notice (probably more than 60-70 days) and substantial financial support from the GoI. Also, assigning 8-10 ISF to each polling station for two weeks would require that 11,640 to 14,550 ISF leave their regular

assignments. This range is more than the total number of ISF on hand in the province (though not more than the total authorized), and it does not account for the need to secure the province's boundaries during the voting period (to prevent an influx of illegal voters, especially Kurds from the KRG) and maintain law and order generally. To ensure adequate security during voting, the province likely will need the assistance of CF.

19. (C) The IHEC Law passed in February, 2007 provides for the appointment of permanent governorate General Electoral Officers (GEOs). The procedure requires the CoR to nominate a slate of five candidates for each governorate, and for the new IHEC to then appoint one of the five. This process is on-going and no permanent GEOs have yet been appointed; in fact, as of July 29 the CoR had not submitted any GEO nominees for the province of Kirkuk. Post does not know if Farhad Talabani will be nominated by the CoR or subsequently appointed by the IHEC.

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